

## INSIDE

He's Back!  
...from Montreaux to  
Mexico & all points in  
between...

Billy F Gibbons on  
the "Billy Bo" Gretsch...  
chocolate & gold V-50  
amp... FX... and the  
scorchin' tone of the new  
18's!!!

4

Introducing the London  
65 Amp...

Peter Stroud's  
exceptional new 18 watt  
2x12 rocks

9

The dog's bollocks!  
Inside the Marshall  
hand-wired reissue Lead  
& Bass and 18 W combo  
amps...

14

Hemp Cone Tone  
Redux...

The harvest is in at  
A Brown Soun!

17

Resonant Vibrations  
with Carlos Santana

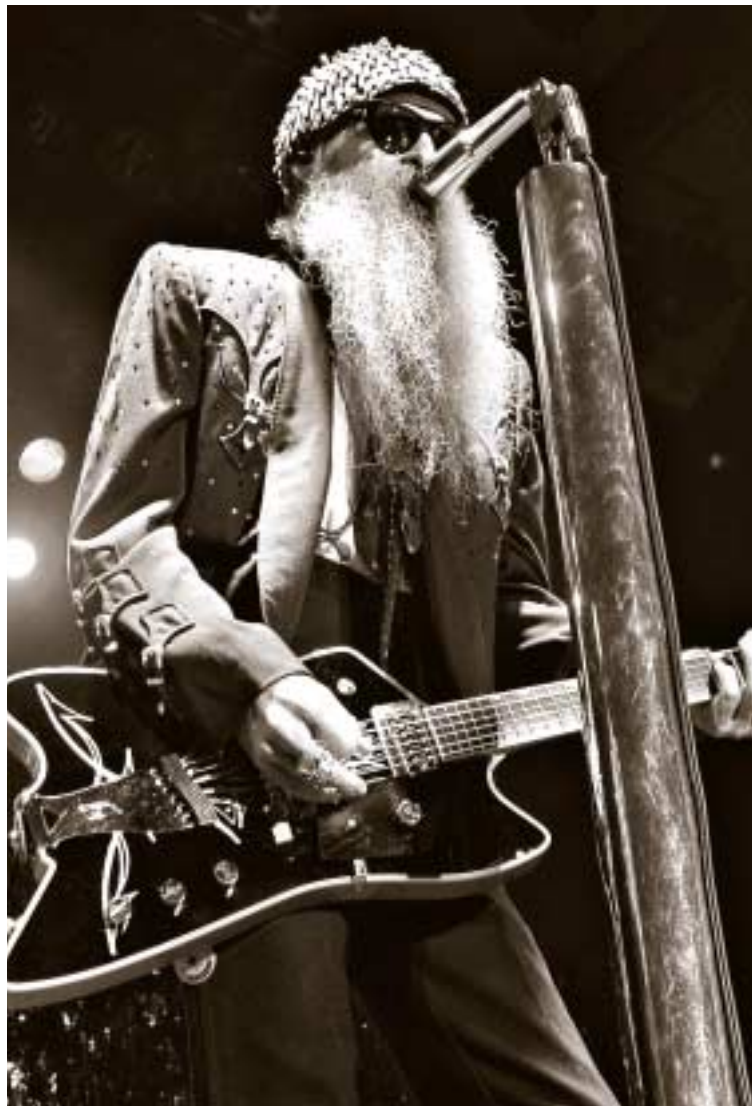
# the ToneQuest

*The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone* Report™  
\$10.00 US, February 2005/VOL.6 NO.4

## 18 Watts of Whoop Ass

*"Somebody once said we never know what is enough  
until we know what's more than enough."*

*—Billie Holiday*



After five years, we still receive more calls and e-mails about how to tame a +30 watt amp for home and club use without compromising tone, further reinforcing the notion that we may not always need as much volume as we think... This issue celebrates the resurrection of the mighty 18 watt amplifiers built by Jim Marshall that are now inspiring innovative designers to build their own unique variations on these rare and timeless classics. So just what is it about the 18 watt amps that makes them the dog's bollocks?

If your signature sound requires a seamless blend of overdriven and

clean tones at modest volume, nailing inspiring tone night to night in unfamiliar venues can be an exercise in compromise. Big amps may require an attenuator at higher volume settings, an over-



## Hemp Tone Revisited... *the Harvest Is In*

"Tone Tubbies are A-OK..." Billy F Gibbons

*"I used John's speakers in conjunction with an old silvertone head and got the coolest, most authentic early sixties garage band tone. I'm definitely a convert."*

—Pete Buck, REM

*In January 2003 we published our exclusive cover story on the hemp cone Tone Tubby speakers built by A Brown Soun in San Rafael, CA, and players as diverse as The Rev, Carlos Santana, Jimmy Herring, Colonel Bruce Hampton, Metallica's Kirk Hammett, Pete Buck, Steve Kimock and Eric Clapton have since embraced the mighty harmonic content of hemp cone Tone Tubbies. Sure, the initial buzz over Tone Tubbies may have been stoked over the use of hemp slurry in making speaker cones, but the staying power of the Tone Tubby speaker can be credited to tone, and tone alone. Don't think for a minute that the use of hemp was a mere marketing gimmick (although we do sometimes wonder if the idea may have been sparked by the effects of a hemp sampling session...) You may also be interested to know that every single Tone Tubby speaker built to date has been created by just one employee at A Brown...Bill Wright.*



Charlie, Hippiie Dave & John Harrison

*We recently spent time with the 'Wizard of Hemp,' John Harrison, catching up on what's been happening at A Brown*

*Soun during the past two years. The wacky crew in San Rafael has been busy, as you are about to discover... Share this one with your bass player, because the hemp bass 10's are out now.*

**TQR:** There have been several versions of the Hemp Tone Tubbies developed since we first introduced them in TQR. Let's talk about the variations and what prompted them.

Tone One, we call the H1, which is still my favorite and Billy

Gibbons' favorite. It was the very first version we produced – the very first recipe. I called our supplier and said, "Will you please make me a hemp cone?" That was the first one and it is still being used to this day. That one basically had no R&D on it. We just got it, built it up, started putting it out and it got rave reviews. Then we found out over time that a few players felt that the low end and midrange were fantastic, but they weren't hearing that real high end that they were used to. Now, there are two different ways we could look at that, because after a while, literally hundreds of H1 owners called us to say, "You know what? I'm starting to get this. The high end is totally different than paper. It's more of a smooth, polished high end as opposed to a real brash, ice picky high end." So then I started thinking about how we could make the hemp Tone Tubby perfect for all players, including 'Fender' guys who were used to hearing screaming highs.

**TQR:** Right, but what you were finding with some people was that their ears were being 'retrained' as they continued to play the H1...

Absolutely, and to this day it's still happening. So then I went ahead and said, "Hey, let's have the cone company brighten the cone up. Let's see what they can do." Well, we didn't want to forsake any of that beautiful low end – that tight low end and the really good midrange – so we added an enzyme to it, hence the name H1E.

**TQR:** The enzyme is applied to the outer edge?

No, the enzyme is in the whole recipe. It's in the whole slew – the batch of hemp pulp used to make the cones.

**TQR:** And that brightens it up a little.



Exactly. It has a quicker treble response, you know, for amps that don't really have a broad sweep on the treble. So we got that and it was fantastic. Then we started hearing from guys that were totally in love with the Vintage 30, which to me is a totally ice pick and real trebly kind of

laser beam speaker. These guys all basically loved the Tone Tubby, but there still wasn't enough high end for some of them. *Some* of them mind you, but not a lot. So then we came up with the last incarnation of the hemp Tone Tubby, which is the H1E-DD which stands for "Deep Dip" where the factory dips the cone up to the first rib on the set of ribs on the cone with a stiffener. It's a subtle thing, and it makes the notes

—continued—

telegraph off the cone and the harmonics just shoot off of it. It definitely adds more immediate highs – even more immediate than the H1E. So we thought, “Okay, you know what, let’s just cut all this stuff out and start offering the H1E-DD as our general cone.” It still has a great low end, great mids, and now it’s got the serious high end – as much high end as you would ever want. There it is.

**TQR:** All right, so does that mean you are building more of the H1E-DD’s now?

Exactly, and players can dial in anything they want.

**TQR:** Well, that’s what the tone controls on the amp are for...

That’s exactly right. The main thing we went for was to maintain that great, fantastic low end, which is the natural character of hemp.

**TQR:** Are you also doing re-cones with Hemp?



Yes. We have people calling up now and off the wall, “Can you do the Jensens in my 1965 Twin Reverb in hemp? Can you do my JBL in Hemp?” And it’s funny you should ask that, David, because Friday we got the JBL 15” – I know you wish I could say D130, but I got the D140

cones out of hemp. The first 15” hemp cone made is a direct fit for the JBL 15 – the D140. It’s a 140 cone with ribs – a bass cone. We built the speaker and did the test and it is magnificently, incredibly more responsive than paper. Then I had another K140 with a factory kit in it. They meet them perfectly side-by-side and the JBL with the hemp cone was just unbelievably... What word am I looking for? *Efficient*. Incredibly so. We did a spectrum analysis on it.

**TQR:** When people ask, we always describe your speakers as being more detailed. You hear a lot of details that you didn’t hear before.

You just took the words out of my mouth. We have so many guys calling up and saying, “You know what? I’m hearing notes out of my rig that I never heard before.”

**TQR:** OK, so now when we last left you in the lab, the main platform for the Hemp Tone Tubbies had become the H1E. But Billy Gibbons is primarily using the H1 – the original hemp cone...



That’s it, and I’m with Billy. I have an H1 in my Deluxe, and I swear it’s the best sounding amplifier on the planet. I’ve had offers from everyone in the

world – immediately they want to buy it. You know why? Because that amp has a really nice hue in it and it will just grab that high end. It’s just so beautiful.

**TQR:** So Billy is using strictly H1’s.



H1’s straight up. He has a stage setup of four 2x12 Tone Tubbies. Four cabi-

nets, so that’s eight Tone Tubbies on stage, and they are under the drum riser. That’s for the stage only – they are not being miked. Then he runs a silent isolation cabinet with a Tone Tubby for the board and sound system. It was a single 12” Tone Tubby going through the whole Shoreline Theater, which is a giant venue out here. It was just unbelievable.

**TQR:** And you have since come out with the Bass 10’s.

We are just so proud of the Bass 10. You know how a lot of bass cabinets have tweeters in them now? Well, you don’t even *need* a tweeter, because the high end is so beautiful. As a matter of fact, we had a one-hour test session today with our first 4x10 bass rig. Our main test pilot is Steve Evans, who plays with Roy Rogers and Coco Montoya. He’s my bass ears like Steve Kimock is my guitar ears. Steve flipped, and I did too. The Bass 10 holds the low end. You can get a five string bass and hit that low B and walk with it - B, C, D# and it’s unbelievably... like you said, *detailed*. It doesn’t plunk out at all. Doesn’t mud out. It’s just incredibly clear, great tight low-end bass tone with great highs.

**TQR:** Back to the guitar speaker – which vintage speaker design is the Tone Tubby modeled after?

The Vox G12 ‘Bulldog.’

-continued-



**TQR:** That speaker was rated at what, 15 watts?



15 watts. That's another thing that is amazing. We are putting in Nomax coils, which is a very vintage thing – the

same stuff they had in the good old days, but for some reason ours handle like 50 to 70 watts. I have never had a blown Tone Tubby come into the shop – ever.

**TQR:** I always thought that most speakers blew as a result of heat building up in the coil...

Well, that, and also erratic sound waves going through the coil. Not smooth, but jerky. Guys that play real erratic like bink, bink, bum, bum, bink. They don't know how to really power into it and lean into it like a muscle car. That's pretty much it, along with the heat factor, and of course, over-powering.

**TQR:** Does low end have a more destructive effect than any other frequencies?

No. Isn't that funny? You would think so, but it doesn't. You are more likely to blow a speaker with a real erratic high end harmonic than you are with a really low frequency.

**TQR:** What can you recone with hemp? Obviously, you can do vintage G12's and new Celestion Blues...

Yeah, totally. Oh, another fantastic thing... our cones absolutely fit some Celestions. We have been doing Vintage 30's.

**TQR:** Any other Celestions? Greenbacks, G12H65's, G12H100's?

Just Vintage 30's, Black Shadows and the new Neodymium G12 Century. Normally, you think you have to keep them original, but with the hemp cone it's just absolutely perfect. No cone cry. No moans and groans, and seriously, it maintains that high end chime. A lot of guys are catching on to our Vintage 30 recones.

**TQR:** So right now you can basically do just those three Celestions.

Right. And we are also getting a JBL D120 hemp cone made

right now as we speak. That will be fantastic for guitar. It will balance it right out.

**TQR:** Are the bass speakers available now?

Yes. It's not even that radical of a frame design – pretty much like the SWR or Eden frame, but of course, you put the hemp cone on there and it's "look out." It's a whole other world. I've actually reconed Edens and SWR's with the hemp cones and it doubled performance. We do that too. They are fantastic.

**TQR:** We tried the Tone Tubby hemp 10's on a VibroKing recently and they were stunning.



A guy from England got four of them and called me last week and said, "John, I put these in my Concert. You know, I'm not just blowing smoke – these things are brilliant, fabulous..." all those great English words, and then he says, "I would not even call them vintage – I would call them the Tone Tubby

Mini 12's because they sound so big." He said he had never heard anything like that. Actually, he is right. It's a really serious, *serious* frame, you know? Pete Buck (REM), who has not changed his rig in 25 years, is now using his AC30 and a 2x10 Tone Tubby cabinet center stage with another amp. He's got a two-amp thing going. We've been getting rave reviews on it from them, and it's an honor for someone like that that has been playing so long to change and add Tone Tubbies to his rig.

**TQR:** Is Carlos Santana still using his original 4x12's?

Yes, the H1E, but we also have the new ceramic Tone Tubby, which I basically targeted for Celestion users. You know, if you put four AlNiCo Tone Tubbies in a closed back Marshall cabinet, it doesn't do them justice. I went to a ceramic magnet for that application. For some reason ceramics live in a closed back situation really well. In the first one I built up, I had a Marshall cabinet with four of our new 40-40 ceramic Tone Tubbies. They have the same exact cones, voice coil, spider and basket as the original AlNiCo speaker, but the motor is different. Carlos heard it and immediately said, "Can we take this on tour?" Just like the Dead did. They were leaving the next day. Bernie Charavalle, who has played with Mike McDonald for 15 years did the same thing. He called me back within a week and said, "John, I'm in sonic heaven. This is the best tone I have ever had in my life." It's perfect. So we have four 4x12's out there that are loaded with Tone

-continued-



Tubby, 40-40's and all four guys went nuts and it sounds fantastic. It sounds like a Marshall cabinet but a notch up, you know. Nothing radical, but it definitely is a thicker, fuller sound.

**TQR:** We haven't talked about the speaker that you built for Eric Clapton...

It's an edge-wound, copper-clad aluminum coil. We built him a new one. The way Dennis Cornell explained it to us, sometimes Clapton will be on stage and he will play really, really soft... There is a situation where he will play really soft on



stage, and the notes would kind of drop out. Dennis Cornell said, "John, Celestions do it, Jensens do it – they all do it." He said even the Tone Tubby does it. So, we came up with

**TQR:** Because it's aluminum?

Yeah, aluminum – copper clad aluminum. It's way lighter. I mean a third the weight. We sent them to England and immediately got a "Good job, mates. You did it!" Isn't that great? I had to make sure that that coil would take a pounding like our regular Tone Tubbies, and it's been about a year now with no blows, no nothing, so it's become another aspect of our regular production. I love all the different versions we've made.

**TQR:** Are you ever going to get into doing something like a hemp version of an EV, for example?

How did you know? I'm waiting for the cone right now. We are going to be doing the 15-EV. However, I do love those EV-12 frames. See, EV has basically gone out of business, almost. I don't know *what* they are doing.

**TQR:** I'm just talking about EV style. A lot of people like them. I don't fully understand what the difference is with them other than they have those big cast frames and...

Well, they have a 2-1/2" voice coil, which is pretty incredible for a 12" speaker. We are going to do something along that

line. You know what? That's a good idea. I hadn't even thought of that one, Dave. That's a great idea. You mean for guitar, right?

**TQR:** Yeah, a lot of country guys like them because they don't contribute any speaker distortion, and they are super clean and can handle a lot of power – like a JBL.

Exactly. That's what the EV-12 does and the JBL-12 will do the same thing. Nothing is off limits. We're always looking... **To**

## Resonant Vibrations

*with Carlos Santana*

*We spoke with Carlos Santana the morning after the presidential election and our conversation began with a mutual acknowledgement that the people had spoken, yet the world would continue to turn (according to Carlos) on just four essential human needs: food, water, electricity and education. Santana is far more than a guitar player; he walks the walk of a true humanitarian, having created the Milagro (Miracle) Foundation to provide financial assistance for educational, housing, and medical needs of children throughout the world. Carlos never mentioned the Milagro Foundation in our conversation, but we are now ([www.santana.com/milagro](http://www.santana.com/milagro))*



© Jay Blakesberg

-continued-

With everything that is happening in this country today, I decided to intensify the frequency of love in my smile, in my eyes, in my hands. Resonant sound vibrations are my tools. This is how I reach people's hearts – their consciousness. They laugh, they dance, they make love... I am a creature of frequencies, and I am not sad – I feel very charged today. People may misconstrue my conviction as arrogance, but I have never and will never be part of the herd. I don't follow. I set my own light inside my heart. I don't ask for Jesus to give me a piggyback ride across the river and save me. I understand that I have the same light in my heart that God gave him, so I will try to utilize it the best way I can and utilize music – resonant vibration – to do the opposite of Bush. He drops bombs, I drop love notes. That's it. I know my place. I may not be Jimi Hendrix or Stevie Ray Vaughan, but what I have is more than enough to make a difference in someone's heart. The light shines brighter in the darkness, and this is the end of the parade of good and evil. There *will be* an exodus. Around the corner there will be a massive, conscious discerning of people who are ready to live their lives and those people who are still playing the good and evil... the war thing. To end the war, you must end it in your mind first. The frequency of love will show the way.

**TQR:** We recently urged our readers to discover who they are as players and artists. We all begin playing by copying others, but at some point, self-discovery needs to occur. The point of making music is to make your own unique statement, isn't it?

Tony Bennett said, "If you take from one guy it's called 'stealing.' If you take from many it's called 'research.'"

**TQR:** Let's turn to gear if we may – your tools, in particular. You have been playing with both the Boogie Mark I and your Dumble head now for awhile...



I cannot do without either one at this point, with all respect to both of them. It's the sound that everybody likes right now when I play live. The only thing that has changed is that I don't use the Altec speakers – I use the Tone Tubbies because they have a different kind of softness. Pardon the pun, but they do sustain in a *super-natural* way where they beget overtones. When you sustain with just one pedal, it hurts your teeth and you have a ceiling. When you sustain without a pedal using the hemp 12" speakers, something happens to the molecules in your

body. First of all, your teeth don't hurt, your ears don't hurt, and it feels like you're being *washed*... They produce an incredible smile, because it's very easy to sustain, but it isn't an annoying or hurtful sound. It's difficult to describe... it's like throwing a flat rock on a still lake. The notes skip and go higher and higher and they change overtones, but you can *control* them.

**TQR:** You play with a lot of dynamics, and having played the Tone Tubbies here for the past two years ourselves, we suspect you also appreciate how responsive they are.

They are *very* responsive, like the feeling of flesh on flesh – very sympathetic to our molecules, unlike the Altec. In certain buildings where there was a lot of wood, the Altecs could



© Jay Blakesberg

sound hurtful. The Tone Tubbies are not hurtful.

**TQR:** Randall Smith mentioned the challenges of moving from venue to venue and acquiring and maintaining your unique sound and sustain.

I'm always changing control settings and marking the floor on stage. Since I don't use sustain pedals, I've had to mark the floor where I can get sustain for different frequencies in relation to the distance between me and the amp. It just means that you have to do a little more work during the



sound check. But since I've been using the Tone Tubbies, to my surprise, I haven't had to mark the floor anywhere on stage. I get the sustain, but through the amps and speakers and not through a Tube Screamer. I really adore Dumble, Randall Smith, Paul Reed and Brown Soun, because like me, they like to transcend. We don't put a low ceiling on our existence. Once we achieve something, we're always thinking of something else to go further. Dumble put his personal Strat in my hands at the Greek Theater and I couldn't believe the sustain. He had done something to it, obviously, but we don't know what. It's kind of like Peter Green – supernatural... You take a deep breath and thank god there are people like Randy, John Harrison, Dumble and Paul Reed, because those people really don't rest. They are constantly transcending things and I get to benefit from it.

**TQR:** You are using a 1x12 cab for the Boogie and a 4x12 cabinet as well, correct?



Yes, a 4x12 with the Boogie head and a Dumble. Lately, they have been getting along, but at first they were fighting. They would repel each other and wouldn't sustain, but lately they have accepted each other,

depending on the room. In fact, I am going to invite all of them together for supper – Randy, Alexander and John Harrison and ask them, "How come sometimes they fight, all three of them – the Dumble, the Boogie and the hemp speakers... Why is that? Other times it is completely cohesive and delicious... I know it depends on each venue – low ceilings and high ceilings, wood and concrete... But how can we make some kind of sensor that monitors these things so the amp can adjust itself? They do this with PA's using white noise, so why not amplifiers? Just like your body adjusts to heat or cold, or you adjust to being with wise people or assholes... you adjust! (laughing)

**TQR:** Do you experience the same variables in the recording studio?

It's the same. We found one room in which everything is just supremely copasetic, and there is another room where I would just never record guitar solos. I've heard horror stories from Jim Gaines (renowned SRV producer, among others, including Carlos) about Stevie Ray, man. He had amplifiers in the bathroom, in the kitchen, in the lobby, and sometimes they would spend a whole week trying to get a pretty tone and they couldn't get anything done because he didn't like

the tone. I'm the same kind of creature, man! When you take a solo, you don't even think of what you're playing. You feel like a kid and someone put water on the slide and you can just *slide*... But if it's dry and your flesh hurts, it's the same thing if the room is not right. So, yes, to answer your question, we found a room at Fantasy Records in Berkeley that is just supreme for tones, but you have to go in the night before and adjust everything. I do have a gentleman named René Martinez who worked for Stevie Ray, and he goes in the night before and gets the tones correctly set so that when I plug in, I just *penetrate* and it's there.

**TQR:** And do you use the same setup in the studio with the Dumble and the Boogie?

Oh, yes. If you look at Pavarotti or Placido Domingo, they have *belly tones*, *chest tones*, *throat tones*, *nasal tones* and *head tones* – on top of your head. The Boogie is from your throat up – very trebly because of the one speaker. The Dumble is your *huevos* and your belly. When they both get together, now you have the whole thing, and I need both amps to get it.

**TQR:** With a 4x12 and 1x12...

This is enough for me to share the stage with Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Warren Haynes, Derek Trucks, Robert Randolph, Larry Carlton and/or Robyn Ford. If I have those two things I can defend myself, otherwise they are going to beat me up.

**TQR:** Have you played at all with the hemp cabinets?



Yes, and that's just another reason to legalize hemp. You can make so many useful things with it... the Constitution of the United States is written on hemp. It's so silly... It's all about tone. We are creatures of tone and we are always trying to find a frequency that is complimentary to the

physical body... the ears and the heart.

**TQR:** When you sound better you play better...

Absolutely. You don't have to think about it when it's not so difficult to get there. **TQ**

A Brown Soun, 415-479-2124  
www.abrownsoun.com,  
www.santana.com